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ABSTRACT

In 1988 and early 1989, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research sponsored a series of forums in New York and London focusing on an important new aspect of educational reform: the concept of parental choice. This article is drawn from the presentations made at these forums and is divided into four sections. In "The Problem," Chester Finn offers a stark appraisal of the state of American education in the wake of 6 years of educational "reform." The second section, "The Theory," offers a two-part overview of the implications of recent research findings on the educational choice movement and its rationale. In "What Makes Schools Work?" John Chubb discusses a Brookings Institution study of 500 American public and private high schools, and James Coleman, in "What Makes Religious School Different?" discusses his research on the effectiveness of Catholic high schools. The third section, "The Solution," discusses how educational choice has been implemented in Minnesota and New York City. Finally, the fourth section, "A Dialogue on Choice," contains excerpts from the question-and-answer sessions that followed the various presentations in New York and London. (18 references) (SI)

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ED313776

Education Policy Paper

Number 2

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE:
Public School Choice and the Future of American Education

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Education Policy Paper Number 2
The Right to Choose: Public School Choice and the Future of American Education

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Manhattan Institute for Policy Research
42 East 71st Street
New York, NY 10021

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE:
Public School Choice and the Future of American Education

The consensus is clear: America's public schools are still in serious trouble. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, educational reform has become one of this country's most powerful and controversial political issues. But the numbers remain appalling. Grades, test scores, dropout rates all suggest that the educational reform movement is failing. Why? Because the reformers aren't trying hard enough? Because their goals are ill-conceived? Or because they're trying to change the schools from above—instead of creating new incentives for change from within?

In 1988 and early 1989, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research sponsored a series of forums in New York and London focusing on an important new aspect of educational reform: the concept of parental choice. "Choice" programs introduce the incentive of competition into the public school system by giving parents the right to select the schools their children attend. Critics dismiss parental choice as a means of improving schooling for middle-class children at the expense of the poor and handicapped. Advocates of choice point to dramatic improvement in the quality of education provided by school districts—rich and poor alike—that have implemented parental choice programs.

The Right to Choose is drawn from the presentations made at these forums. In "The Problem," Chester Finn offers a stark appraisal of the state of American education in the wake of six years of educational "reform." Formerly assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Education under Ronald Reagan, Finn is now professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University and director of the Educational Excellence Network. He is co-author (with Diane Ravitch) of *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?*

"The Theory" is a two-part overview of the implications of recent research findings on the educational choice movement and its rationale. John Chubb, a senior research fellow at the Brookings Institution, discusses a Brookings study of 500 American public and private high schools; James Coleman, a professor of sociology at the University of Chicago and the author of some 22 books (including the celebrated "Coleman Report") and over 200 scholarly articles on education, discusses his research on the effectiveness of Catholic high schools.

"The Solution" discusses how educational choice has been implemented in Minnesota and New York City. It includes presentations by Joe Nathan, a senior fellow at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, who is widely regarded as the nation's leading expert on the design and implementation of educational choice programs; Seymour Fliegel, former deputy superintendent of District 4 in East Harlem, who discusses how he implemented a choice program in the junior high schools of his district; and Cole Genn, superintendent of District 27 in Queens, who previously served as principal and founder of District 4's Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics.

"A Dialogue on Choice" contains excerpts from the question-and-answer sessions that followed the various presentations in New York and London. The participants include Robert Wagner, Jr., president of the New York City Board of Education; Frank Macchiarola, formerly Chancellor of the New York City Board of Education; and Eugene Lang, president of the "I Have a Dream" Foundation. ■

1.

THE PROBLEM:
A Depressing Look at Education in America Today

Chester Finn Jr.: I'm part of a beleaguered minority group: professors of education who believe that kids actually ought to know something by the time they finish going to school. Accordingly, most of what I say here today is going to be fairly depressing, since the state of American education itself is fairly depressing. The problem starts with the education departments of this country's university campuses, which have long since been overtaken by very, very bad ideas. Bad ideas eventually give rise to bad practices. In education, bad practices eventually give rise to ignorant kids. Ignorant kids are what our educational system is producing today.

I want to talk first, however, about "successful" kids, the ones who persevere and graduate from high school. Of those kids, 70% eventually enroll in college; of those who enroll in college, 50% graduate. We have 27 million adult Americans walking around the streets of this country with bachelor's degrees in their pockets. Unfortunately, the average "successful" product of our schools doesn't know much and has very few skills. Here's some corroborating data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is the closest thing we have to a barometer of educational outcomes in the United States. The figures I'm going to give you come from the eleventh grade in 1986. Bear in mind that these are the kids who stuck it out until they were in the eleventh grade, who didn't drop out, who probably graduated from high school the following year:

- Only 6% of them could handle reading at a level of difficulty that enabled them to handle original source material, serious essays, scientific material and traditional college-level textbooks.
- Only 7% of them could handle math problems of the kind that require the use of simple algebra.
- Only 20% could write a letter that satisfied modest requirements for adequacy.

Chester Finn Jr.: *Professor of Education and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University and director of the Educational Excellence Network. Dr. Finn was formerly Assistant Secretary for Research and Improvement at the United States Department of Education. His latest book,* What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know, *was co-authored with Diane Ravitch.*

As for history and literature, Diane Ravitch and I wrote a book called *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* based on a 1986 assessment of what eleventh-graders knew about American history and Western literature—the first such assessment ever made in the United States. This test included such questions as: "In which century was the First World War?" The students did "well" on that one. Some 55% of them successfully placed World War I between 1900 and 1950. But when we asked them in which fifty-year span the Civil War occurred, only 33% could answer the question correctly. Some of them placed it before Columbus, some of them placed it after Eisenhower. Keep in mind, by the way, that 80% of these kids were studying U.S. history that year.

Yes, there are wonderful exceptions all through American education. It's a huge system, and there are exceptions to everything you can say about it. But on the average, even the "successful" products of our system know very little and are functioning at a disturbingly low level of intellectual skill. They then go to college and, if they're lucky, are given the secondary education that they should have acquired in high school but didn't. They graduate with a bachelor's degree in their pockets—but without a higher education.

Six years ago, the Secretary of Education told us in *A Nation at Risk* that we had a problem. Indeed we did. Since then, we've been working very hard. State after state has passed comprehensive educational reform legislation. "Education" governors have been giving it their all. Legislators and business leaders and newspaper editors and crusading professional educators have been giving it their all. We're spending more, we're trying harder, we're fussing endlessly. What of it? As of yet, there has been no demonstrable improvement in the actual outcomes of American education.

Why? And what can we do about it? I don't know why, not entirely. But let me give you a couple of notions as to why we're not doing better.

First, and to me most vexing, is that while everybody seems to agree that the nation as a whole is at risk, almost everybody has simultaneously concluded that their own kids and their own schools are doing just fine. The most recent international comparative assessment of education looked at 13-year-olds in about seven countries in math and science. Our kids, as we're growing accustomed to discovering, did the worst in the world on math. But one of the background questions on the assessment asked the kids: "Do you think you're good at math?" Guess which kids led the world in *thinking* they're good in math while trailing the world in *being* good at math?

Parents are no better. Every state in the country that uses standardized tests is reporting to its citizens that their kids are above average. Now if you're told by the superintendent of public education that your kids are fine, your schools are fine, your city is fine, your state is fine—well, after enough years of being told it, you're probably going to believe it. But it isn't true. It's self-confidence rooted in quicksand. It's a house of cards. We're deluding ourselves about the state of our educational system, and that's one important reason why we're not doing better. Everybody is assuming that somebody else should alter *his* behavior because it's somebody else who's got the problem.

Second—and let me use a manufacturing metaphor, even though most educators hate it when I talk this way—we've never bothered to figure out what it is that we want the product of our educational system to look like. We've never paused to describe the specifications for the product that we want this system of production to yield. We've fiddled with the system, we've changed the rules by which we operate our schools, we've altered the finance arrangements and the incentive arrangements. But we did all of this without ever asking: "What would we like our kids to come out of school knowing? Or being able to do?"

A third possible explanation is that we have ignored what I respectfully suggest to you is the first great finding of educational research—which also happens to be the first great finding of common sense about education. Kids tend to learn that which they study, and they tend to learn it in rough proportion to the amount of time that they spend studying it. We know that this maxim is true. But we haven't lived by it in our efforts at educational reform.

Look at the high school graduating class of 1987. These are the kids who entered college a year and a half ago, the same kids who entered high school the year that the excellence commission declared the United States to be a nation at risk. How many of them actually took the high-school courses that the excellence commission said ought to constitute the "new basics" of American education? In 1983, the commission defined the "new basics" for high school students as follows: four years of English, three years of math, three years of science, three years of social studies, two years of a foreign language and a half-year of computers. Four years later, only 13% of American high school students were actually exposed to those courses. Eighty-seven percent took something less. If you drop the foreign-language and computer requirements from the list, the results aren't much better: 70% still took something less than the remaining "basic" courses.

If you care about the distribution of equal opportunity in American society, by the way, you should know that black and Hispanic kids as a group took that "basic" menu of courses at a rate of about 22%, while Asian kids took it at the rate of about 54%. If you're interested in at least one partial explanation for why Asian kids are doing well in American education, that's it.

Fourth, our education profession, by and large, is pursuing the wrong goals. It's obsessed with whether your mind is functioning—not with whether you're learning anything. I'm making a distinction here between skills and knowledge, and suggesting to you that our educators in general are so transfixed by cognitive skill that they've concluded that as long as you're thinking, it doesn't really matter whether you know anything; as long as you're reading, it doesn't matter what you're reading; as long as you're able to analyze, it doesn't matter whether you possess knowledge worth analyzing.

This is an oversimplification, of course, but it's only a partial distortion of reality. If you doubt it, look at the reception of E. B. Hirsch, who suggested in his book *Cultural Literacy* that there really is a body of knowledge that everybody ought to possess by the time they come out of school, if only so that they will have the shared background necessary to allow them to communicate with one another. For his troubles, Hirsch has been denounced as a cultural imperialist, as a latter-day Gradgrind. Every bad thing that can possibly be said about an educator has been said about Hirsch. The education profession has persuaded itself that he's some sort of lunatic, that as long as kids are "thinking," they don't really have to *know* anything.

Finally, while the private sector is currently engaged in herculean efforts to improve the educational system, it has not had any effect whatsoever on the actual quality of education. Why? Because it has allowed educators to set the agenda—and because it has not applied to education the norms that it would apply to business. Such as: What is the product? Are there ways of reconfiguring the production system that might produce a better product? Are we making a profit? Are we getting any return on our investment? *What is the bottom line?*

Business people are accustomed to thinking that way—about their businesses. But they go native when they turn their attentions to education. They stop looking for a bottom line. They end up indulging, with some honorable exceptions, in what I call "Lady Bountiful" programs. They give resources to schools to provide some additional service, but they do not in any significant way alter the rules by which the school systems operate, and do not in any significant way exact demands on the school systems for a better product. The result is predict-

able. They feel good about themselves. They get terrific public relations. But the schools don't improve one iota—except insofar as those few kids who happen to be touched by the additional services are marginally improved by them.

If you want to improve education in America, you've got to keep this fact firmly in mind: educators, like the people who run every other large enterprise in American society, are deeply "conservative" in the sense that they don't wish to alter their accustomed ways of doing things. They may be politically liberal, they may vote for Democrats, they may have left-wing notions about foreign policy, but when it comes to their own work, they do it the way they've always done it, and they'll never change their ways unless somebody either induces or forces them to do so.

Needless to say, all of this would be perfectly fine—*if* you were content with the overall performance of American education, if you believed that American education exists primarily to serve its employees. But I don't believe that. I think that the American educational system and its employees are means to an end. That end is kids who come out of school having learned something. While there are ways of bringing that end about, we haven't embarked upon very many of them. The educational reform movement, despite its best efforts, has not altered the rules by which the system is operating. Neither has the business community. And these rules are not adequately serving American society in 1989. ■

2.

THE THEORY:
The Rationale for Educational Choice

WHAT MAKES SCHOOLS WORK?

John Chubb: I want to try to explain why someone who considers himself something of a liberal is a supporter of educational choice. Choice, after all, is an idea that's been championed by Ronald Reagan and William Bennett, and most recently by George Bush. As a result, many people seem to think that it's some sort of a right-wing conspiracy: something intended to make the poor worse off, make minorities worse off, and help out kids who come from well-to-do families that can figure out how to use the choice system to their benefit.

Well, that's not what choice is all about. In fact, I support educational choice because I think it's our best hope for improving America's schools in general and for improving America's urban schools—which are, of course, largely attended by poor children and minority children—in particular.

Over the last six years, as Chester Finn points out, there has been a tremendous amount of effort nationwide and in cities around the country directed toward trying to improve our nation's educational system. Spending on education per pupil has increased somewhere from 40% to 50% in real terms. Teacher salaries are up more than those of any other occupational group. Students are being required to take more tests and being held more accountable for their performance. Teachers are also being held more accountable. More testing of teachers and more elaborate evaluation systems for teachers are being imposed. Graduation requirements are being increased around the country. Homework requirements within districts are being stepped up.

It stands to reason that some educators are responding to calls for parental choice by saying: "Why do you want to upset the apple cart? We're *already* trying to improve the schools." Unfortunately, their efforts simply aren't working. Our dropout rates are still roughly 25% nationwide and close to 50% in large cities. Our test scores are still poor in com-

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John Chubb: *Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and author of numerous scholarly articles and books, including* What Price Democracy?, *what examines the effects of political control of urban schools on educational achievement. Dr. Chubb's analysis involved studying the performances of 25,000 high school seniors nationwide.*

parison to the scores of countries around the world—as well as in comparison to scores in this country just twenty years ago.

Yes, there's been a tremendous amount of concern about the quality of education in this country, and a tremendous effort to try to do something about it. But while some aspects of these efforts are, generally speaking, good ideas, they aren't very promising when considered as overall approaches to school reform. Our research suggests that educational choice is far more consistent with what we now know about how schools can be improved.

My conclusions about choice come in large part from a recent study of America's high schools based on a random sample of 500 public and private high schools nationwide. Within these schools, we obtained responses from roughly 20,000 teachers, principals and students. We asked them questions about such things as family background; life at home; life within the classroom; teacher activity; decision making within the school; school policies; relationship of the school to outside influences; and the activities of school boards, administrators and unions. The data provide a fairly comprehensive picture of what our schools are like and how they are run.

Let's get down to the results. What kind of schools promote achievement? What is the key to student achievement? That's how we're rating schools, by the way, and I don't apologize to anyone for rating schools in terms of student achievement. Other goals are important, but student achievement is crucial.

What, then, is the most important determinant of student achievement? It's the aptitude, or entering ability, of the student. That's bad news, because it's hard to control what students bring to school. But the good news is that when you take into account a whole range of factors that promote student achievement, the second most important influence on student achievement is the school itself. In fact, the influence of the school itself, measured comprehensively, was about as important as the influence of the wealth and education and occupational status of the family—and more important than the influence of peers.

We all know, impressionistically, that some schools are good and some are bad. You wander around from one school to the next and you can tell when you're in a good school and when you're in a bad school. Reformers have always known this, but we've never been able to systematically figure out what it is that distinguishes a good school from a bad one—until now. Our survey revealed that teacher salaries were unrelated to school performance. Per-pupil expenditures were unrelated to school performance. Class size was unrelated to school perform-

ance. Graduation requirements were unrelated to school performance. Homework policies were unrelated to school performance. In other words, the kinds of things that reformers are trying to change, the things that state legislatures are working so vigorously on right now, are basically unrelated to how schools are doing.

Those qualities that *do* seem to make a difference are not things that school reformers can easily influence with policies. Even so, they are immediately perceptible to anyone who walks into a good school. Effective schools have clear, ambitious goals that are clear to everybody. They are focused on excellence. The teachers and the principal agree about what the school is trying to accomplish. School reformers and school researchers who have looked at effective schools have often said that successful schools seem to have a "mission." Everyone in an effective school is trying to accomplish something, whether it's excellence in math and science, the performing arts or sports. Everyone in an effective school is on the same wavelength.

We also found that the leadership within effective schools was stronger. The principals knew where they wanted to go. They wanted to take the schools somewhere and they knew how to get there. These principals were much more focused on education than management. We asked them why they decided to become principals. In the effective schools, they said things like: "I wanted to take control of the personnel of this school. I wanted to take control over school policy. I wanted to control things around here." In the ineffective schools, they were more likely to say: "I preferred administration to teaching." Now what kind of a leader is that? That's not a leader, that's a manager. And the bottom line was that in the successful schools we saw educational *leaders*, not administrators or managers, running the school.

Professionalism was much higher in the effective schools. Within their classrooms, teachers were given the freedom to operate more or less as they chose. They were treated with respect—as if they had a body of knowledge and a set of skills that should be allowed to operate freely. Teachers in effective schools also got along with one another much better. They treated each other as equals, as colleagues. They cooperated with one another. They coordinated their teaching. They knew what was going on in each other's classes. They typically characterized their schools as "a big family."

Putting these three things together—sense of mission, strong leadership, high sense of professionalism—we concluded that the effective schools operated like a community. By con-

trast, the ineffective organizations behaved much more like a bureaucratic agency—the kind of place where rules and regulations, not trust and shared values, hold things together.

We found that effective schools made a big difference in student achievement. By our estimate, a student's involvement in an effective high school for four years, regardless of that student's aptitude, peer group influences or family influences, yielded *one full year* of achievement difference over what would have been accomplished in an ineffective high school.

What encouraged some schools to become effectively organized while others remained ineffectively organized? Not surprisingly, it turns out that it's somewhat easier to have an effectively organized school if you have bright, well-behaved kids from well-to-do families. It's easier to organize an effective school out in some fancy suburb.

Still, you can have an effective school organization with just about any group of kids, just about anywhere. We found that the real key to whether a school became effectively organized or ineffectively organized was the autonomy that the school enjoyed from external control by administrators: that is, bureaucrats, superintendents, unions and school boards. The more freedom that the school was granted to chart its own course, the more likely it was to become effectively organized; the more that the school was imposed upon by requirements from outside, the more likely that it would be fraught with internal conflict, that it would be ineffectively organized and would perform badly.

Why is that? Let me offer one simple example. Control over personnel is the most important quality that a school needs to have in order to be effectively organized. If a principal has control over hiring and firing, that principal is likely to hire and maintain in the school a staff of professionals whom he or she respects, who share his or her values, who agree on the mission of the school, who agree on curriculum, who agree on instructional methods, who are inclined to cooperate with one another. A principal with that kind of control is not likely to dictate to teachers. Instead, that principal is likely, because of respect and trust, to delegate responsibility and to involve the teachers as a team.

On the other hand, if you have a principal who *doesn't* have control over who's teaching in the school, that principal is going to distrust teachers and the teachers are going to distrust one another. Conflict will thus be inherent, and the school is not going to perform effectively.

Under what conditions are schools granted this kind of autonomy? The bad news is that within the public sector, autonomy is more the exception than the rule. The only time you can be pretty sure that a public school is going to enjoy autonomy and is going to be able to or-

ganize effectively is when that school is out in the suburbs, when the kids are performing well and when the parents are well-educated and actively involved. In those settings, administrators and school boards are more willing to delegate responsibility to the school and the school can operate as an autonomous organization.

Unfortunately, the schools that need the most help are the inner-city schools with poor kids and uneducated parents—and those schools, rather than having the autonomy and encouragement to organize effectively, are the ones that usually are the recipients of crackdowns and mandates and instructions about how to perform, that are most completely crippled by rules governing personnel. The public schools that most need autonomy, in short, are the ones that are least likely to get it. That's bad news for school reform.

The good news is that we've learned something from looking at private schools that has helped us understand how autonomy can be provided within the public schools. While public schools receive autonomy only under exceptional circumstances, private schools receive autonomy under *all* conditions, whether they're in big cities, whether they're part of large religious systems, whether they're teaching poor kids, whether the parents are poorly educated or well-educated.

Why? The answer is simple: competition. Private schools, regardless of their objectives, must please parents. They are under competitive pressures to please parents. Because of those pressures, they are encouraged to delegate decision making down to the level where parents can be most effectively engaged, where the needs of parents can be understood, where a bond can be established between the school and the parent to ensure that the parent is happy enough to continue patronizing the school. Parents are least happy when decision making is vested far away in some central office, out of their reach. If decisions are being made in a distant place, in a way that parents can't influence, parents are going to be unhappy—and they're not going to patronize that school.

To sum up, if you're going to have an effectively organized school and one that can perform well, that school is going to need autonomy. The real issue in school reform, then, is: how do you provide autonomy and still hold schools accountable? After all, you can't just turn over the keys of the school to the teacher and principals and be sure that they're going to be held accountable. The structure of the existing system makes that impossible. The incentives are missing. There's no mechanism to hold teachers and principals accountable. That's why

you see this profusion of testing and accountability systems that often end up choking off the very autonomy school reformers are trying to provide.

The only empirically and logically compelling way in which autonomy *and* accountability can be maintained is to move to a different system of accountability. You need a system that holds schools accountable not from the top down, but through the market process, through the competitive process. You need a system that holds schools accountable by giving them autonomy—and by observing how well the schools succeed in winning the support of parents and students. Schools that are successful in promoting achievement and attracting parents in organizing effectively will be patronized and will flourish. Those that fail will not be patronized and will suffer and have to be rebuilt.

That kind of accountability system emphasizes the wishes of parents and students much more than the wishes of politicians and bureaucrats. But there's every reason to believe that it's the kind of system that will best promote academic achievement. Under it, schools will have the incentive and the flexibility to organize effectively, to develop missions, to operate more professionally. Schools will also have the incentive—and this is crucial—to develop bonds with parents and students, those mutually reinforcing relationships which are so essential to good education. And students will be matched with schools and programs that fit their needs and are most likely to motivate them to succeed.

Now there are many ways in which these systems can be operated: through open-enrollment mechanisms, through universal magnet systems, even through voucher programs. One way or another, though, unless we move to a system that emphasizes more choice and competition, it's likely that forums like this will be held year in and year out, from now until eternity, as we watch our public schools struggle to improve—and improve very little.

WHAT MAKES RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS DIFFERENT?

James Coleman: I'd like to talk about some research results about schools that have significant implications for school policy—by which I mean not only policies affecting schools, but policies that also affect families.

These results derive from a large study of sophomores and seniors in American schools, a study that made it possible for me to compare private and public schools. Private schools in the United States constitute about 10% of the total school population, and about two-thirds of that private school population attends Catholic schools. With those figures in mind, let me discuss what I call the puzzle of the effectiveness of Catholic schools. This puzzle has six pieces:

- Catholic high schools are more effective in bringing about growth in student achievement. This difference can be seen when you compare students enrolled in Catholic high schools to students enrolled not only in public schools, but also in independent private schools. This greater growth doesn't occur in all subject areas—it doesn't occur, for example, in science. But it does occur in mathematics and in verbal test scores.
- Catholic schools are more demanding in terms of the course work that they require of a student than are either public schools or independent private schools. Students in a Catholic school take more mathematics, more foreign languages, more classes in other academic subjects, than do comparable students in either a public or an independent school.
- Not only do students in general learn more in Catholic schools than in other schools, but students from disadvantaged backgrounds—minorities and children of parents who have little education—are especially benefitted.
- Children from families that are deficient but not disadvantaged (that is, children whose parents have adequate income and education but are otherwise deficient in establishing good parent-child relationships) show somewhat lower achievement rates and considerably higher dropout rates in public and independent and private schools when compared to similar students from non-deficient families. Their per-

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James Coleman: *Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago and author of the 1966* Coleman Report, *the basis for national school desegregation policy throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Dr. Coleman is the author of 22 books and 200 scholarly articles. His latest book,* Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities, *is a comprehensive study of the educational achievement differences between students in public and Catholic high schools.*

formance relative to children from non-deficient families, however, is much better in Catholic schools.

- Dropout rates from Catholic schools are much lower than dropout rates from public and independent private high schools. The difference in dropout rates remains substantial when background differences, achievement scores and school experiences (that is, grades, absences and the disciplinary history of the student) are statistically controlled. They also remain great when religious affiliation is statistically controlled.
- Finally, there is some indication that the results I've described hold true not only for Catholic schools but also for other schools with a religious foundation and a religiously homogeneous student body. This indication is based only on a small number of schools, and it has only been examined for dropout rates, not for the other outcomes that I've described. It does, however, suggest a possible similarity for other outcomes as well.

It makes sense that schools which are academically more demanding, as is the average Catholic school when compared to either the average public or independent private school, will bring about higher achievement among the students who survive those demands. What is puzzling is the coexistence of these results with lower dropout rates and with the special benefits for students from disadvantaged or deficient families. Ordinarily, greater academic demands increase the performance of children who are already performing above average—but do so at the cost of forcing out some students who are doing badly and increasing the gap between high- and low-performing students for those students who do remain. In Catholic schools, the reverse is true. Catholic schools make stronger academic demands and exact higher performance, yet their dropout rate is much lower and the gap between children of different backgrounds is diminished over time.

Perhaps a start towards an answer can be made by asking this question: how is it that religiously based schools are able to make stronger academic demands than other schools? After all, this was not always the case. Catholic schools were long regarded as academically inferior to both the public schools and the independent private schools. What has happened?

One thing that's happened since the '60s is a radical transformation of the internal structure of the family. Parents now have a greatly diminished capacity to determine their

teenage child's high school curriculum and to impose requirements regarding schoolwork. This transformation is part of a larger "revolution" in which the authority of parents over some areas of their teenage child's activities has been overturned. The most proximate cause of this revolution was the baby boom of the late '40s, which gave more power to the young by increasing their numbers. In addition, there was an increasing loss of community among adults resulting from high rates of residential moves and a decline of urban neighborhoods. To this was added the growth of the youth-oriented commercial culture, which had as one of its goals the breaking of parental norms and constraints.

High schools confronted in the late '60s and early '70s with post-revolutionary students were not prepared for the change. Colleges confronted with post-revolutionary students in the '60s and '70s, in attempting to make themselves more accessible to minorities, reduced entrance requirements, in some cases almost to the vanishing point. High schools were freed by the reduction in college entrance requirements to offer courses that would pacify post-revolutionary students. As student choice proliferated and parents no longer in authority acquiesced, a new kind of public high school evolved, one commonly known as the "shopping-mall" high school. Foreign languages went into eclipse, while college preparatory mathematics, physics and chemistry went into a decline that was only somewhat less steep.

What does all of this have to do with the puzzle of Catholic schools as I have described it? Schools grounded in a religious community did not, as did public schools, lose their community. Although the revolution within the family occurred in Catholic families just as in non-Catholic ones, it was unable to transform the Catholic school into a shopping-mall high school. This was because of the social connections among parents, and between parents and school, in Catholic schools. These connections helped to provide parents with what might be called "social capital" to aid in resisting the revolution.

Now some of the conditions that shielded religiously grounded high schools from the effects of the youth revolution can also be found in independent private schools. One condition, however, is missing: most independent private schools are not surrounded by a community. The absence of the community means that parents lack the social capital that would support their authority against the youth revolution. Thus the independent private school stands somewhere between the public school and the religious school in the balance of power between students and parents.

The social capital available to parents of students in the religiously grounded school has a number of consequences. First, the curriculum for students planning to attend college remains an academic college preparatory curriculum. The demands are not relaxed. Second, the schools remain able to impose demands—and parents have the recourse to help them enforce these demands. As a result, students take more academic courses, do more homework and learn more than do public-school students who have been liberated by the revolution.

This explains one part of the puzzle: why students in the average Catholic school take more demanding courses than do comparable students in public schools. But it doesn't provide an answer to this question: why is the greater rigidity of Catholic schools not accompanied by higher dropout rates? Why do the higher levels of achievement in Catholic schools not produce a greater gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students?

The answer here also appears to lie in the existence of social capital provided by the religious community surrounding the school. In this case, however, the social capital is made available to the student rather than the parent. One of the differences between a school which has a religious foundation and a secular school is the institutional connection between the family and the school. That institutional connection can have a special importance for the student whose family is weak or broken. The social capital of the religious community surrounding the school can substitute for that which would ordinarily be provided by the family. It is especially valuable for children from disadvantaged or deficient families—those students who are typically at the highest risk of doing badly or dropping out.

Now what does all this indicate about the kind of high schools that will be viable in the future? I've suggested that today's public high schools are less viable than those of the past because of changes in the family, not because of changes in the school. I've also suggested that it is only in special circumstances of the sort that are found surrounding some religiously grounded schools that the viability of today's schools remains relatively intact.

There are two quite different paths that public schools might take to reestablish their viability. The first path would be to follow the pattern of religiously grounded schools in strengthening the family's authority and replenishing the social capital that's available to students and parents. The idea is to recreate the school community, and by the school community I don't mean the community within the school, but the community that relates the school to the families outside the school.

The second path, by contrast, abolishes completely the conception that the student is under parental authority and that the school is functioning under a grant of authority from the parents. Instead, it establishes the principle that the relevant relation is directly between the school and the student—that it is the student who is an autonomous person, who is solely responsible for his or her own education.

The existence of these two paths quite obviously implies the abandonment of the current practice of assignment of children to particular institutions. Some form of parental choice is essential if parents and youth are to sort themselves into whichever of the two paths they find more desirable or appropriate.

But choice is necessary for a second reason. Given that the school is a social institution, the school-student relation should have the form of a *contract*—either a contract between family or student and school, or a social contract among families or among students. The conception of a child assigned by the state to a particular school is a conception that was viable when the school was an outgrowth of a homogeneous community. It's no longer viable for most schools—or most students.

The best of the schools taking the first path that I described will excel not merely by concentrating on the narrow task of "education" but by extending this task to include rebuilding the community that's fallen into disrepair, by recreating the social capital that's been lost. This isn't a simple task. It involves drawing parents into school-related activities—even at the danger of seriously complicating the school's fundamental task of teaching. It involves reconnecting parents with different children so that those parents can, as a community, establish the norms that constitute the necessary social capital to support their children's educational activities.

The best of the schools following the second path, the path of autonomous student responsibility, will inevitably be boarding schools. Workable examples of the second path exist within the public school system as well as outside it. (I have in mind, for instance, the two North Carolina Governor's Schools.) It's possible, however, for a school to follow *both* of these paths: to attempt to build up its parental community, to facilitate parents regaining authority over their teenage children, but at the same time to create the conditions within the school that encourage responsibility on the part of youth themselves. If there's one single policy change on the part of a public school system that will aid both of these paths, it's the institution of a system of explicit choice among schools, a change which gives principals, teachers, students and parents greater responsibility for building a well-functioning school. ■

3.

THE SOLUTION:
Educational Choice in Practice

CHOICE IN MINNESOTA

Joe Nathan: In 1985, Minnesota's Gov. Rudy Perpich, a liberal Democrat, proposed that families be allowed to choose among various public schools so long as the receiving district had room and so long as the movement did not have a negative impact on desegregation. He also suggested that eleventh and twelfth graders be allowed to go to colleges and universities and that the dollars follow the youngsters.

A poll taken shortly after this proposal was first made showed that about 33% of Minnesotans were in favor, about 60% opposed. More recent polls have found that somewhere between 55% and 64% of the population is in favor, while somewhere between 30% and 35% is opposed. In other words, we've seen a shift from about 2-to-1 against to 2-to-1 in favor over the past four years.

I would like to describe the kinds of proposals that have been adopted in Minnesota and some of our experiences with them. I want to begin, however, by outlining what I believe to be the three basic rationales for public school choice. First: there is no one best school for all students or all teachers. That is not an economic theory. That is not a political theory. That is an educational idea.

Second: expansion of choice among public schools is part of a broad historical movement that has already expanded opportunities in voting rights, housing rights, employment opportunities and so on. Having more opportunities for families to choose among schools, especially public schools, is part of a broad, progressive movement which has been going on in this country for two hundred years.

Third: controlled competition can help stimulate improvement. Not unlimited competition. Not total *laissez-faire* competition. *Controlled* competition.

Let's take a closer look at that first point. One of the dominant themes of American education reform has been if we could just find and adopt the one best educational system,

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Joe Nathan: *Senior Fellow at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota and Director of the Regional Issues Forum. He coordinated the National Governors' Association project* Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education *and helped establish educational choice systems in more than 25 states.*

we'd have wonderful schools. Now we know there are certain distinguishing characteristics of effective schools. Indeed, we've heard about several of them in the course of this discussion. But while those characteristics are undeniably important, that doesn't mean every good school is necessarily going to be like every other good school.

My own experience suggests that there are many paths to excellence. When I was a young public school teacher in St. Paul, I wanted to see if there could be such a thing as a school where youngsters could learn by using the whole world as a place to learn. I wanted to work in a school where youngsters could learn about the Civil War by going to Gettysburg. I was interested in combining classroom work with community service. I wanted to work in a school where older and younger children worked together. I also believed that traditional graduation requirements made very little sense, based as they were on accumulation of credits rather than demonstration of competence. I was much more interested in demonstration of competence as a way to show that you were ready to graduate.

With the help of other teachers and parents, I was finally able to persuade the St. Paul schools to start a school designed along the lines I've just described. The St. Paul Open School contained five hundred students, ages 5 through 18. Older and younger students worked together. An advisory council made up of parents and students made the major decisions as to how the school operated. We had a budget. We decided how that budget was spent. We decided at one point, for example, that rather than have an extra administrator or an assistant principal, we would trade that position in for other positions, as well as for a van. We purchased a van rather than having an assistant principal—on-site management, 1971-style.

Now our school was wonderful—for *some* youngsters and *some* teachers. Others hated it. A group of St. Paul parents came to us a few years later and said that they wanted a much stricter school of their own. "We believe," they said, "in a school where children wear uniforms. We believe in a program where kids have homework every night. Would you support us?" And we said yes. Since we believed that parents and children needed different options, we worked closely with them. As a result, the Benjamin E. Mays Fundamental School was started. The St. Paul Open School and the Benjamin E. Mays Fundamental School are still two of the high-quality options offered within the St. Paul public school system today.

That's why I believe in choice—because I've seen it work, I've been a part of it. But I want to be very clear with you: I think there are some public school choice plans that are worse than no choice. Public school choice systems that work well have certain common characteris-

tics. These include goals and expectations for all of the schools; an opportunity for parents to select; an opportunity for teachers to select; face-to-face counseling for parents who are uncertain about what school to choose; and admissions policies that don't allow schools to reject youngsters on the basis of past achievement or behavior.

Most of all, families must have the opportunity to choose among public schools that teachers have *helped* to create. This is very important. I'm not talking about public school choice plans where a central office like the state board or the district office designs the program. When educators are given the opportunity to help create more work in distinctive programs, when educators have the choice, they feel more like professionals and they feel better about their work—and you soon witness a shift of students to public from private and parochial schools. It's happened in East Harlem. It's happened in Minnesota.

Before quickly going through what's happened in Minnesota, I want to point out that we don't have a debate in this country about whether we're going to have choice in public schools. We've already decided that there will be choice in public schools—for rich people. Affluent families in our society may choose among public schools in their district; they may pay tuition to a neighboring district; or they may send their children to private or parochial schools. They often purchase homes in exclusive suburbs where the price of admission is the ability to buy a $300,000 home and pay taxes on it.

I'm not criticizing those options. I'm merely saying that the decision has *already* been made in this society about whether we'll have educational choice for the well-to-do. The real question is: will we have options for young people from lower and moderate income families and for the educators who choose to work with them? Minnesota has decided that the answer to that question should be "yes." In 1983, a law was passed that allowed up to a hundred youngsters in secondary schools to move across district lines to public schools which had academic programs that had been selected as outstanding. This very small program was followed in 1985 by a more comprehensive five-point plan that Gov. Perpich called "Access to Excellence." The five points were as follows:

- The state would allow students to make their own choices of public schools across district lines—and would allow eleventh and twelfth graders to go to colleges, universities, and vocational schools in other districts.
- The state would provide $8.5 million for staff and program development to help school districts give teachers the opportunity to develop distinctive educational programs.

- Schools would be allowed to apply to the state board for waivers of state rules and regulations. Not civil-rights regulations—other kinds of waivers pertaining to curriculum requirements, graduation requirements and the like.
- The state would move from paying approximately 65% of overall funding of the schools to paying 84%.
- The state agreed to develop a series of statewide test measures that would provide more information on how youngsters throughout the state were doing on a variety of measures.

These points are being phased in gradually. The eleventh- and twelfth-grade post-secondary option, for example, was passed in 1985. In direct response to this law, the Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools, without any new mandates and without any new money from the state legislature, created new post-secondary programs in the St. Paul schools. Today, every high school in the city of St. Paul offers courses taught cooperatively with the University of Minnesota where youngsters can get both high school and college credit. Moreover, the number of advanced placement courses offered in the Minnesota schools has increased—quadrupled, in fact—in the last three years, also without new mandates and without new money.

The second law, passed in 1987, allows youngsters aged 12 to 21 who have not succeeded in one school to go to another school, so long as the receiving district has room and the movement does not have a negative impact on desegregation. About 3,000 youngsters have used this option in the last two years. About half of them are youngsters who had previously dropped out of school. This option has stimulated a number of districts to increase the number of available programs, and numerous teachers have asked their schools to set up some kind of optional programs. Minneapolis, for example, has just set up a new program at the suggestion of union leaders—a high school that meets in the evening. Now I realize this is nothing new in New York City, but this is a new idea in Minneapolis, and it's been very successful. Some of the teachers like it because now they can sleep late.

The most recent law, which hasn't been implemented yet but which has already gotten a great deal of national attention, allows youngsters aged 5 through 18 to move across district lines so long as the receiving district has room and the movement does not have a negative impact on desegregation. Receiving districts may not select among students on any basis relating to academic achievement or behavior. Suburban districts may not pick and choose among kids on the basis of previous behavior.

This measure was designed to respond to the concerns of students who felt that they were trapped in school districts where considerable amounts of money were being spent on, say, hockey and basketball, with whatever was left over being spent on advanced math or science or language or music. Even though there might be another school just five miles down the road that had some of the programs they wanted, they weren't allowed to go to that school if it was in another district—unless, of course, they were affluent enough to pay tuition.

One objection to this measure has been that huge numbers of kids would supposedly leave small districts. So far, that isn't happening. The law has already been phased in on a voluntary basis, and in the present year about 435 youngsters out of 700,000 are using it. Of those 435 youngsters, about 51% are going from larger districts to smaller districts. Of the 137 youngsters who used it last year, 100% of the parents whose children had not graduated said they liked the plan and intended to use it again this year. The projections are that about 2,900 youngsters will use it next year. By 1991, no school district will be able to prevent a student who wishes to leave from doing so, as long as overall movement in and out of the district does not have a negative impact on desegregation.

Gov. Perpich never claimed that choice would solve all the problems of the world. Neither did I. Public school choice in Minnesota was not intended to and certainly will not solve all of the public school system's problems. Gov. Perpich says: "We recommend that states look at choice as a powerful tool which can be used to help supplement and complement other efforts to improve schools." That's exactly right. Choice is a powerful tool—but one which should be used in conjunction with other reforms like school-site management, more high-quality childhood education, more thoughtful use of computers, and other kinds of things.

What was developed *in* Minnesota was developed *for* Minnesota. Other states will have to work out their own plans. But it's been very encouraging to see a growing number of professional education groups, although certainly not all of them, admit that there are good things about the Minnesota plan and about the concept of choice in general. Sy Fliegel, for example, was recently asked to come to Minnesota by the Minnesota Federation of Teachers for a statewide conference. He was introduced with considerable sympathy—and received considerable support. I think that's one significant indication that choice in public education is an idea whose time is at hand.

CHOICE IN EAST HARLEM

Seymour Fliegel: Let me tell you a little bit about the District 4 choice program and how it began. Did we say when we started out that we were going to have a great choice system ten years down the line? No. It didn't work that way at all. We just attempted to set up some good schools, and we started in the 1973-74 school year with three. One was the Beta School, which is for "difficult" youngsters who are "acting out." The Beta School was an immediate success. For those of you who are interested in starting alternative schools, that's the easiest kind of school to start—a school for "difficult" students. Believe me, every principal in the world will support that school. (Beta, incidentally, stands for "Better Education Through Alternatives.")

The second school was Central Park East, an "open education" school. That was easy to start, too, believe it or not. Why? Because the parents of youngsters who want to go to an open education school are considered "troublemakers." And the teachers who want to teach there are always raising embarrassing questions at staff conferences—questions like "What are children really learning here?" Principals are delighted to see those parents and those teachers go. The third was the East Harlem Performing Arts School, which was just as easy to start because it's not a "serious" school. After all, music and art are not "serious" matters. It's social studies that are very important—to the educational bureaucracy, anyway.

We started small. But we gave those three schools recognition and support. They began to do well. And we gradually created a climate of openness within the educational community. Our message to teachers was: "Come forth with your ideas. Tell us what your dreams are. We'll put you into business." Well, they did. And as diverse as was the personality and philosophy of each of these teachers who came forward, they always had the same reaction when I said, "Yes, let's do it." They always said: "Do you really mean it?" Most teachers are used to being told: "It's fine, but we can't do it now." Of course, "now" never comes. With us, though, it came. We said "yes" and we meant "yes."

One of the important concepts behind District 4 is that a choice system without quality and diversity is meaningless. I keep getting calls all the time from people who say: "We're

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Seymour Fliegel: *Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. He was Superintendent of District #28 in Queens and formerly served as Deputy Superintendent of District #4 in East Harlem, which received wide attention because of the success of its educational choice program.*

going to switch to choice." I tell them: "What are you going to do? Offer the same five inadequate schools you have now and let the parents choose one of them?" Choice must offer you quality or it does not offer you anything.

We had what we thought was enough quality and diversity by 1981. Still, you never know when you have anything worthwhile in New York until *The New York Times* puts it in an editorial. When *The New York Times* ran this marvelous editorial about District 4's schools in 1982, we knew we had good schools. So we then moved into what we call a "free choice" system on the junior high level. That meant every sixth grade youngster *had* to choose one of sixteen junior high schools. They could not automatically go to that sacred neighborhood school that we all so dearly love.

Choice is not a panacea. It is a mechanism for school improvement, it is the beginning of school improvement, but it is not the end result. I want to talk for a moment about what that end result ought to be. John Chubb talked earlier about how you have to know where you're trying to go. I call that knowledge "vision." This vision is one of the most important things a school can have. And your vision can't just be in your head. You've got to communicate it to a group of teachers, parents, and youngsters so that everybody in that school knows what's important. When you go into a school, you ought to be able to ask anyone in there what's important about their school. If they can't tell you, then you know there's no clear vision in that place. When I was a teacher, I knew what was important in our school: you had to have the shades straight. That was the most important thing. If the superintendent came around, I always made it my business to have the shades one up, one down, one down, one up. We knew what was important. At least *that's* different now.

Meaningful change can take place in the most difficult of situations. I don't care where it is, I don't care how poor the community is, I don't care how old the buildings are. When asked the difference between a lady and a flower girl, George Bernard Shaw said that it's not how she behaves, it's how she's treated. I say to you: it's how you treat professionals, children, and parents that determines how they behave. If you have high expectations of youngsters, they will not disappoint you. If you think they're thugs, they won't disappoint you, either.

That's why choice is so important. Choice gives youngsters, teachers and parents a sense that they own the school because they selected the school, because the school attempts to meet their interests and abilities. The concept of ownership is a good capitalist idea. People

seem to treat what they own much better than what someone else owns. If every youngster in the school feels that this is *my* school, this is *my* place, you see very little graffiti, you see very little vandalism, you see the students *protecting* that school.

One last word. I live in Queens now. But whenever I need a haircut, I always go back to my old neighborhood in the Bronx. I get into the car, I pay the tolls, and I travel to the old barber in the old neighborhood to get a haircut. A haircut, you see, is a serious matter. Schooling doesn't seem to be as serious. In New York City, if you live in an apartment building and there's a doctor or a dentist on the ground floor, *nobody* from that building would be found dead in that doctor or dentist's office. People come from all over to go to those two doctors—but not from that building.

It never occurs to anybody to apply the same kind of logic to schools. But that's going to change. Ten years down the line, I think New Yorkers will be saying: "You mean there was a time when we *didn't* have choice? When we *couldn't* select a school that we go to?"

CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR CHOICE

Cole Genn: I moved from District 4 into a very different kind of district. District 27 is located in southwest Queens. It's a very large district—82 square miles. It has 29,000 students. We're pleased to have a toll bridge in the middle of the community. I have to pay a dollar to visit some of my schools.

District 27 is a a very successful district in terms of overall student achievement, but it's somewhat uneven in the distribution of that achievement. It has some superb schools, some mediocre schools, some very poor schools. Obviously, I came in looking for places to make some changes, and the first thing I did was counsel myself to have some patience and take the time to learn about the people with whom I was working. I spent a good part of my first year establishing a collegial atmosphere. I wanted to make it clear to my people that they really are professionals, that they can take a stake in the school business.

I'd like to describe four mini-schools which we've started in District 27. We established a science and math mini-school at one junior high school. It fit very well in that community, which sits between Belle Harbor and Rockaway Park. It was an integrated school from which many children were fleeing. We needed to anchor the community in order to keep the school integrated. So we attached the words "for the gifted" to the school, and it immediately started drawing in children from all over the community. One local elementary school which had been sending its students elsewhere for many years—to Mark Twain in Brooklyn, to Brooklyn Poly and elsewhere—subsequently sent a delegation of the Parents Association to me demanding that we open another class next year. This proved the political realities of what that mini-school could do.

On one end of the peninsula, we had a school that was changed with the help of the community school board. Everybody got on the bandwagon and loved the idea. The principal loved the idea. The staff came along with him, and the school made it. On the other end of the peninsula, we had a school in trouble and turmoil. It was a school in which we felt a great deal of work was needed. But rather than working with the school and the community, we were forced to take a piece of the school away from the principal and put it under the direction of

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Cole Genn: *Superintendent of District #27 in Queens. He was principal and founder of the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, director and founder of the Academy of Environmental Sciences, and director and founder of Harbor Junior High School of Performing Arts, all in New York City.*

my deputy. This was one of the lessons we learned in East Harlem. If they work with you, fine. If they don't, sometimes you work without them. We separated out the sixth grade, pulled together a cadre of people, did a summer institute with teachers and students, and began a mini-school right in the middle of the larger school. Next year, that mini-school will become a full two-thirds of the whole school.

The fourth mini-school was very interesting. It's a junior high school whose staff and principal really believed what we said and created a mini-school of their own—along lines that I should have thought of but never did. They took three groups of children and focused on them. For those of you who aren't familiar with New York's schools, we organize classes from one to twenty. Eighteen, nineteen and twenty are not college-bound. What this school did was focus on these three groups of children.

As Sy said, the easiest group to get into a mini-school are the problem kids. *Everybody* will give them up. So this school was able to take three groups of problem kids—mildly retarded, poor-performing and dropouts—and focused on building a mini-school of six classes using special education funding. We were able to create class sizes of 20. This school has been attacked by the special education department, the union, and several other people. But it has nonetheless managed to survive, solely because of the desire of these people to create something new.

Now my agenda is not simply to create a lot of mini-schools. I'm trying to create the conditions that make a choice program possible—to create credible schools that can be part of a choice program at some point in the future. As Sy said very clearly, choosing between two lousy schools is not choice. What will happen in District 27 over a period of time, I hope, is that we will continue to create trust in the community, causing people to believe that we know what we're doing. Then choice will become inevitable. But I think that first and foremost, rather than focusing on choice and suddenly deciding to create a choice program out of thin air, you must take a look, a deep look, at quality. You must create distinctive programs that suit the needs of many different groups of children. Once you have enough of those programs, *then* you can begin a choice program. Not before. ■

4.

A DIALOGUE ON CHOICE:
Questions and Answers

Robert Wagner Jr. *(President, New York City Board of Education)*: I'm very much for competition within the New York City public school system, but one of the things that troubles me is that if you look at the two most successful poor districts in the city of New York, the models are totally different. One is the model of competition that Tony Alvarado and Sy Fliegel put into place in District 4. The other is District 13 in Brooklyn. It was the very opposite of choice—totally autocratic, in fact. Yet both models were dramatically successful. So one question I'd like to pose is whether the issue in urban education isn't one of leadership rather than choice.

John Chubb: I think that many school researchers would agree on what the most common characteristics of good schools have to be. I would doubt that there's a great deal of difference between the schools that succeed in a system of competition and choice and the schools that succeed through the force of a vigorous district superintendent. The question is: what things do you have to do in order to get good schools to come into being? The great virtue of a system of competition and choice is that it almost requires that the schools, in order to succeed, do these things. Choice creates powerful incentives for schools to clarify their goals, to give more responsibility to teachers, to involve parents, because they won't succeed if they don't do these things.

You can get effective schools through other means—such as the force of powerful leadership. But if we have to rely on the development of truly unusual leaders in order to save our schools, our prospects simply aren't going to be very good. The current system is simply not set up to encourage that kind of leadership. A system of competition and choice, on the other hand, automatically provides the incentives for schools to do what is right.

James Coleman: There are two ways for accountability to come about. One way is from the top down, which is a bureaucratic mode of authority. The other way is from the bottom up—for there to be accountability to parents and children. I think everything that we've seen suggests that the second is a more effective mode of accountability than the first.

Historically, we've had accountability from above in American education, which was all right as long as we had relatively small school districts or as long as the school districts were relatively homogeneous. That doesn't work in current circumstances, and that's why the systems of choice have come to be so effective relative to the systems that don't have choice.

Wagner: Are choice and competition a way of avoiding the issue of resources? We spend far less per student in the New York City school system than is spent per student in Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties, not to mention the private school system here in New York City.

Chubb: When you look at the history of school finance in this country and the variations in school quality and school finance across the country, there's simply no evidence that there are systematic relationships between the two, that you can buy improved performance. Well-allocated resources are great, but there's no reason to believe that simply throwing more money into the system as it's currently set up will make a significant difference.

Peter Flanigan *(Chairman, Student/Sponsor Partnership)*: Prof. Coleman talked about the excellence of the inner-city Catholic schools. It's my understanding that the cost of a student in a New York City public high school is about $5,000 a year. The cost of a student in an inner-city Catholic high school is about $3,000 a year. If that's the case, it's hard to see that more money is the key to unlocking that excellence.

Wagner: I guess what I was talking about wasn't so much the parochial schools as the contrast with say, the elite private schools of New York, where you would get about three times more spent per student as is the case in the public school system. I happen to believe--and I think Prof. Coleman's book is an important statement in that regard—that we have a lot to learn from the non-public schools, particularly the parochial schools. And I'm not sure the lessons totally have to do with dollars.

Eugene Lang *(President, "Have a Dream" Foundation)*: What do you do with kids in elementary school who are supposed to acquire the basic tools of reading and writing, but who don't for some reason? Without those tools, everything else you try to do from that point on

becomes more and more of an obstacle course. When these youngsters get to a point where you're giving them the opportunity to make choices, will they have the basic tools to be able to make valid choices and take advantage of them?

Frank Macchiarola *(Former Chancellor, New York City Board of Education)*: When I was chancellor, we had a war between two groups of people. One group believed in basic skills and focused on the kinds of things that Gene was talking about. Another group of people, represented by some of the panelists at this forum, had a clear commitment to basic skills but took exception to the rigor that the pro-testing people wanted. The issue, however, was one that was being fought over by people who were basically friendly about education and respectful toward kids.

Unfortunately, what's happened in the politics of education in this town is that we're no longer talking about what goes on in the classroom. We're talking about the political structure, we are talking about the influence of this or that special-interest group, we are talking about how a reform in Albany is somehow going to be translated into more effective education for youngsters.

I see no reason to fight over whether you believe in magnet schools or whether you believe in basic education in all schools. I was a believer in magnet schools. But I will tell you that they're never going to work unless the *whole* school system is moving toward excellence.

Arlene Mark *(Sponsor, Special Education Class, "I Have a Dream" Foundation)*: How will the choice model address special education students in general? Who will be their advocate? Will there be a natural response to special education needs through the marketplace?

Cole Genn: Special education students will always have their advocates. In fact, part of their biggest problem is that they have too many advocates outside the school and not enough inside the school. But I think we have finally gotten to a point where our schools are beginning to face the reality that special education students are students, that they're real children, that they are part of just about every school program.

I agree with you that in the process of creating choice we have to make sure that those kids become part of that choice system and become treatable like all other children. And I

really don't have a full set of answers. I know that District 4 has done a marvelous job of creating units and special programs for special education and then integrating them into the smaller schools. We still have a good distance to go out in Queens.

Seymour Fliegel: In District 4, the magnet schools that were the basis of the choice program didn't start by going after the best students. In fact, we made a point *not* to take the best students. This kept the principals happy. We took our poor students and our middle students first. Now, of course, we can offer all of our students choices.

Graham Down *(Executive Director, Council for Basic Education):* I wonder where the center of excellence in Manhattan is for producing really good truck drivers and office cleaners. We know we can run magnet schools for successful professionals-to-be. But there are an awful lot of other people out there. How are we going to cope with them?

Genn: We understand that. We have focused on science and math because we wanted a winner, because it was sexy. But I would love to have the same model for the truck drivers and the cleaners. I have no problem with that. I think the magnet-school concept will work with any type of child—as long as you understand who that child is and create a school for that child.

Kenneth Lay *(Director of Education, External Programs, IBM Corporation):* I'd like to ask Chester Finn a question about the role of businesses in education. I know any number of organizations that want to try to change the system. But they're confronted with a system that, as you suggest, is so rule-bound and tradition-bound as to be impervious to change. What can they do?

Chester Finn: One of the tragedies of American education is that in many cases the only people who run really effective schools are people who behave like outlaws in their own school systems. When you get an educator who's willing to say "I'm going to do what this school needs, regardless of what the rules at headquarters say I should be doing," you then often get a very good school. You also get an outlaw.

Business can support these outlaws, and that would be a perfectly reasonable thing to do. Or business can seek to change the rules by which the system operates, the very rules which the outlaws are having to break in order to be successful. Or it can try to do both things in the same system at the same time. The short-run advantages lie with backing the outlaws. The long-run advantages lie with changing the rules of the system itself. The point, however, is that business has to do *something*.

Let me close on this note: when the history of education in the '80s is written, the most important point in it will be that after about eighty years of professional control of education, the '80s was when we decided that civilian control was a necessary thing and retrieved it. ■

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